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So We Made A Study

EVERY year hundreds of social workers pop in—so to speak—to the membership of the National Conference. And twelve months later they have popped out again. In another year or two or three, a great many of them pop in again—and out.

The Conference decided to find out something more about these comings and goings. So we made a study; a more or less informal one, but something well worth looking into. Before checking up on the results, however, a little additional background is worthwhile . . .

Many loyal, long-time members of the National Conference have urged that in seeking new members and in retaining established ones the Conference should stress the importance of continuous memberships as opposed to sporadic one-year affiliations. They have pointed out repeatedly that such longer-range memberships provide continuity and balance to both the Conference organization and the member's social viewpoint. They have pointed out further that social workers, in remaining members over a period of several years, should regard their memberships as investments in a better Conference and in better social work.

The Conference itself long has been convinced of these arguments. As an organization depending wholly upon memberships for support, it is well acquainted with the financial inconveniences attributable to a large volume of short-term memberships.

Members come and go, but the costs continue. The process of recording new members and maintaining them briefly in the Conference records is an expensive item when considered in volume. (Once a member drops out, he returns—if at all—as a new member). The billing process is another. But the major item is

the annual meeting. Preliminary preparation and planning for each meeting involve considerable expense. The meeting itself—which compresses something comparable to a complete university course into one week—really is costly.

A one-year membership at the \$3 or \$5 rate does not cover the per capita cost of the annual meeting. Such a membership carried continuously over a period of years does balance the costs.

The Conference has been aware that the probable principal reason for fluctuations in the individual membership lists is that many persons maintain memberships only in years when they actually attend the annual meetings.

Selecting at random from the files the names of one hundred persons who formerly maintained \$5 memberships, the office sent each person a letter, enclosing a stamped return envelope. Aware that one hundred opinions would scarcely provide the complete answer—when approximately 16,000 individual persons have belonged to the National Conference in the past six years—the Conference sought to equalize this by including a cross-section of various classes of members. Consequently, the one hundred names represented agency executives and staff workers, persons who had belonged for several years as well as those who had belonged for one year, and those whose memberships had expired two or three years ago as well as those who dropped out during the current year.

"Why," asked the three-point letter, "are you not continuing your membership? Why did you join in the \$5 class rather than the \$3 class (which does not provide the Proceedings)? What suggestions would you make looking toward changes or improvements in Conference operation or service?"

The mailman returned four of the queries unclaimed. Several of the group did not answer. Pleasantly unexpectedly, however, 12.5 percent of the replies included checks and requests for renewal of memberships. Twelve and one-half percent of the past members indicated they belong only during years in which they attend the annual meeting. Twelve and one-half percent abandoned individual memberships because their agencies have become members of the Conference. The same percentage are out of social work—but would rejoin the Conference if they return to the field. Nearly seven percent regard themselves as permanently out of social work and uninterested. Slightly more than 43 percent ascribed personal financial reasons, mainly of a temporary nature—and in almost every case expressed the hope of returning to the Conference membership very soon.

In answer to the second point of the letter, it was virtually unanimously the members' interest in the Proceedings that prompted them to pay the added \$2 membership which provides the volume. Parenthetically, it might be noted that the replies contained many complimentary observations concerning the value of the Proceedings.

When the tabulations were made, one of the surprises

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PUBLIC WELFARE IN THE WEST

Area Which Will be Host to the National Conference Next Summer Successfully Pioneering in New Social Work Services

By CHARLES F. ERNST

IN coming to the Northwest the next year, the National Conference will penetrate an area in which there have been public welfare developments of peculiar importance since the Conference last met on the Pacific Coast in 1929. In the four Northwest states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, changes have been rapid since the beginning of the depression.

Prior to Federal aid for unemployment relief, these states generally left public assistance to county responsibility. Then came a period of Federal-State administration of local relief. Recently three things have characterized progress in all four states: (1) Rapid and sometimes experimental developments under plastic conditions which made changes relatively easy to accomplish; (2) A drive toward assumption of more administrative responsibility by the counties; (3) A trend toward improved standards of personnel.

Emergency agencies set up in the early years of the depression represented the first serious attempt at organized state welfare programs in these states. This broke the ice, making citizens conscious of welfare needs and possibilities. Since then the situation has been very fluid, resulting in the establishment of state departments of public welfare and, in 1937, in legislation in all four states setting up central authorities in public welfare to meet the requirements of the Social Security Act. These recent enactments have given form, coherence and permanence to the public program, although the patterns in the various states differ in details. The new legislation in the Northwest has some unique and original features, due partly to the fact that legislatures had a clean slate upon which to write for the most part. The pioneer spirit which peoples this section has applied itself to developments in public welfare.

Pioneer self-reliance again reveals itself in a tendency

WHEN the National Conference of Social Work holds its 65th annual meeting next June 26 to July 2 in Seattle, it will meet in a section of the country which is making important contributions in the development of public social work services. New public welfare agencies have been launched throughout the Northwest and new relationships established between public and private agencies. A picture of the progress in these directions is contained in this discussion prepared especially for the October Bulletin by Charles F. Ernst, director of the State Department of Social Security of the State of Washington.

away from the Federal-State control that characterized emergency relief measures and in the direction of administration by counties. In all four states county boards are established with administrative responsibilities. In Oregon four members of the county board of seven are appointed by the Governor of the state, in addition to two county commissioners and a local judge. In Idaho the county board of five consists of one county commissioner, the county administrator, and three appointees of the Governor. In Montana the five

members of the county board are appointed by the Governor. One of them must be a woman.

In Washington the local administration is in the hands of the county commissioners, under certain controls by the state as to budget, personnel, and standards. The commissioners are assisted by a citizens' advisory committee whom they appoint and whose special function is research on the local level to the end of reducing the need of public relief. Qualified secretaries are authorized for these committees. Also, the state has assisted in the development of county and community welfare councils for planning which extends beyond the scope of the public department. The sponsorship of these councils is being gradually transferred to the State Conference of Social Work as an unofficial, non-partisan body. Citizen-participation is keynoted throughout the Washington program.

All of these states have made some progress with the merit system, either by statutory provision that public welfare employees shall be selected by a merit plan, as in Washington, or by setting up a merit system by department regulation, as in Oregon. Montana and Idaho report that they are moving toward the operation of merit plans with the help of "Federal pressure." In Washington the plan is definitely in operation and examinations for the majority of the positions have been

held and certified lists established. In Montana maximum and minimum salary rates have been adopted. In Washington a minimum rate of \$100.00 per month applies to all state employees. In-service training plans are being worked out and some scholarship grants have been made for attendance of promising workers at the University of Washington's Graduate School of Social Work, or other schools. This will tend to relieve the acute shortage of trained workers which has been a brake on progress to date.

Looking across the line to our cousins in British Columbia, we find similar problems met by measures which are somewhat different, due to differences in government and legislation. Administration is less centralized in the provincial government than is true in the states, and social security funds have not been relatively so abundant. Public health is administered under the Department of Social Welfare, and there is a health insurance law which is ahead of anything this side of the border. The province is proceeding thoughtfully, deliberately, and constructively to work out its other problems.

In all of these developments the private social agencies have kept abreast with their valuable specialized contributions to the welfare of communities. They have been generous of effort, personnel and training facilities for the public program. In general, their budgets have been somewhat reduced in recent years, but by transfer

of some activities to public agencies, and by a re-shaping of function, they are adapting themselves to their indispensable part in the way of service, experimentation, and pioneering. In Seattle, for example, the private agencies, under the leadership of the Community Fund and Welfare Council, have conducted careful surveys of their programs, eliminated or combined some, and adapted others to changing situations.

It has been twenty-five years since the National Conference has visited the Northwest, whose four states embrace one-eighth of the area of the United States. It is a good deal of an event when the Conference comes this way, and literally provides an opportunity of a lifetime for many staff members, as well as volunteers and lay persons who are expected to attend in large numbers. Californians, too, are looking forward to this meeting on the Pacific Coast with enthusiasm. In fact, we would like to think that the Conference program will be of such effect as to have its repercussions felt around the entire rim of the Pacific. The Conference looks out of its east windows frequently; here is a chance at the west windows, from which the view is especially significant these days.

A most cordial welcome will be extended the Conference, and much benefit expected from it. Perhaps, too, some of the recent developments of this growing region will be of timely interest to those who attend the Conference from other parts of the country.

Registration Rule Changed

IN 1931 the Executive Committee of the Conference extended to all agency members the privilege of registering at the annual meeting persons from their boards and staffs without the payment of the personal membership fee or an attendance fee. The purpose of this action was to make it possible for the agency member to extend the privilege of the annual meeting to board members who might thereby be interested in attending and young or new workers who might thereby become interested in the Conference and subsequently become members.

It was not intended that this should replace the membership of persons who could and should be personal members of the Conference. A study of the use of this privilege shows that the number of such free registrations originally allotted is too high on the average and is greatly in excess of similar privileges accorded by other organizations.

Therefore at its recent meeting, the Executive Committee unanimously voted to change the regulation so that hereafter institutional members paying the \$25 fee will be allowed five free registrations, and sustaining members paying the \$10 fee will be allowed two. Such free registrations are strictly limited to board or staff members of the agency maintaining the membership.

Special Committees

THE Conference Program Committee has provided seven special committees for the 1938 annual meeting in Seattle. The committees and the chairmen are:

Care of the Aged, Miss Mary Thompson, Council of Social Agencies, Chicago; Inter-Relation of Employment Insurance and Compensation Services and Social Work, Paul Kellogg, Survey Associates, New York City; Prevention and Treatment of Blindness, William E. Bartram, Ohio Commission for the Blind, Columbus; Social Aspects of Children's Institutions, A. Ethel Barger, Milwaukee Orphan's Asylum, Milwaukee; Social Treatment of the Adult Offender, Edgar M. Gerlach, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Washington, D. C.; Statistics and Accounting in Social Work, C. Rufus Rorem, American Hospital Association, Chicago, and Medical Care, for which no chairman yet has been selected.

New Proceedings Published

HAVE you received your copy of the 1937 Proceedings? Appearing for the second successive year in modern type and binding, the book was distributed this month. It contains sixty selected papers presented at the Indianapolis meeting. The Proceedings is sent to all Conference members who pay an annual fee of \$5 or more. The regular retail price is \$3. Orders may be sent directly to the publishers, the University of Chicago Press, 5750 Ellis Ave., Chicago.

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE DECADE

The General Secretary Reports on Some Major Changes and Developments During the Period 1927 to 1937

By HOWARD R. KNIGHT

THE past decade has seen many changes in social work. The enormous expansion of public welfare, first to meet the emergencies of mass relief and now in the developing programs of social security, has brought thousands of new people into the field. Administrative problems undreamed of twenty years ago are being worked out. Social work, instead of being the "Little Orphan Annie" of pre-war community life, now is one of the most important functions of government, consuming a large share of the tax money.

Broad questions of social work policy have become vital problems of public policy. Many of the basic concepts and axiomatic principles of the social work of yesterday are challenged. An increased public concern over social work compels us as never before to justify the methods and costs in terms which the so-called average man can appreciate.

Just as other social work organizations have had to question their methods and results and even the validity of their existence, so the National Conference of Social Work finds itself facing new situations and new problems. It is time that we take stock of ourselves.

The function of the National Conference as stated in the preamble of its Constitution is: "The National Conference of Social Work exists to facilitate discussion of the problems of practical human improvement, to increase the efficiency of agencies and institutions devoted to this cause and to disseminate information. It does not formulate platforms." Its essential characteristics include a membership of individuals and agencies open to all who are interested, and the discussion of the aims, methods and philosophy of social work without committing officially any member to statements or poli-

JUST as the broad field of social work has greatly changed and developed during the past ten years, so has the National Conference of Social Work experienced an era of growth and expansion of service. Much of the National Conference program of development has taken place during the period of depression, with attendant complications. Much is being realized right now. Much is ahead. Part of the story of the past decade of National Conference history is contained in this article which is a summary of the first section of a Report by the General Secretary to the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Social Work, presented at the Executive Committee's October meeting in New York City.

cies with which he may not agree. It is important that there shall continue to be a time and place where all the factors of social work—professional and lay, private and public—may be explored. Here all sections of the country, all racial backgrounds and religious faiths may join for the exchange of experience, discussion of new ideas and the benefits of mutual conference.

Even though attendances are on the upgrade, the results of the Conference are not to be measured solely in size of attendance at the annual meetings but in the steadily improved standards of

social work practice in the local community. The Conference as an organization is only a tool by which those interested in the problems of human improvement may learn from the knowledge and experience of others how to do a better job in their particular situations and may contribute from their own experience and knowledge to the solution of problems in other communities. Its annual meeting furnishes the time and place for this discussion and conference. Its publications help spread the results of the discussion to thousands of communities, meanwhile recording the story of changing social work. Its publicity secures national interest in social problems and the methods of social work.

The Conference is a membership organization. Its financial support comes almost entirely from membership fees. Its policies are controlled by the members. The growth of membership is shown in the following table:

1927.....	3,027	1932.....	4,250
1928.....	3,106	1933.....	3,788
1929.....	3,551	1934.....	4,441
1930.....	4,266	1935.....	5,797
1931.....	4,842	1936.....	7,681

The unusual increase in membership in 1936 was due partly to the new ruling, inaugurated in Atlantic City, requiring registration and the payment of a membership fee at the annual meeting if the registrant were not already a member.

Compulsory registration became necessary when an increasing proportion of attendants at the annual meeting failed to register voluntarily and participate in some measure in the financial support of the Conference. This policy now receives practically universal approval as a fair and just requirement. However, the renewal rate of memberships has declined. Too many people regard the membership fee as something to be paid only in years when they can attend the annual meeting. They fail to recognize it as a professional responsibility to be maintained continuously because of the service rendered by the Conference to social work.

The right to vote for officers and committee members has been made available to all members regardless of their ability to attend the annual meeting in any particular year by the adoption some years ago of the "mail vote." The official ballot now is sent to each member eligible to vote or who will be eligible to vote by the payment of the membership fee some two months before the annual meeting. Formerly the total vote rarely exceeded 500; now it is usually more than 2,000.

DURING the past decade two studies have been made of the attendance at the annual meeting. The original one (1924-1927) gave us for the first time a careful analysis of regularity of attendance, distance traveled, size of the community from which people came and other information that could be secured from the registration records.

A new study covering the years 1931-1936 was completed this past summer. It was undertaken to determine any changes that had occurred in the constituency of the annual meeting and for comparative purposes followed the lines of the earlier study.

Records show 25,964 attendances at the six annual meetings representing 19,070 different persons. Three out of four persons (77 percent) attended but one annual meeting while 3.4 percent attended one-half or more of the six meetings. But 94 or 0.5 percent attended all six meetings. The average attendance during the period of the first study was 3,007 and during the last six years, 4,327. During the past three years the actual attendance has been in excess of 6,000.

Approximately 1,900 different communities have been represented at the annual meetings during the past six years. Ninety-nine communities in 38 states have been represented each year of the six . . . The range of influence of the Conference through direct representation at the annual meetings has steadily increased through the years. Today the annual meeting of the Conference is always one of the four largest conventions of a professional character held in the United States . . . This increase of attendance is not the result of high pressure promotion in any way but the natural response of social work to the opportunities afforded.

This increase in size not only of the membership but also the attendance has increased the operating costs of the Conference . . . The Bulletin circulation has increased and printing costs are rising, etc. The operating budget of the Conference has increased from \$28,440 for the year ending May 31, 1927, to about \$46,000 for the year ending December 31, 1936 (within this period the fiscal period was changed from mid-year dates to the calendar year).

During these ten years many new activities have been added to the regular work of the Conference. Among these are better program building with program committee meetings for which expenses of committee members are paid; a real publicity department; a service to state conferences; the cumulative index; an editorial committee for which expenses are paid; and a much more efficient organization for the annual meeting.

Of the ten years covered, at least five were depression years when travel items virtually vanished in agency budgets, salaries were reduced and positions uncertain. Two of the meetings, Des Moines and Memphis, were held in sections of the country where a large attendance was not possible and one was held on the Pacific Coast which increased the cost. It was only at the Atlantic City meeting that compulsory registration more effectively balanced income and size of attendance.

The Atlantic City meeting itself, however, entailed a story of financial problems, for the unanticipated decision to meet there instead of Washington placed an unexpected and unusual burden on the Conference. All of the local expenses usually provided by the host city were assumed by the Conference. Special contributions ultimately provided for all of this except about \$1,800 which was absorbed into the current budget.

TEN years ago the permanent staff of the Conference consisted of three people. The normal permanent staff now numbers eight.

Ten years ago the program was organized around ten (later twelve) permanent divisions and the Kindred Groups (later renamed Associate and Special Groups) which were independent organizations in special fields of social work and for purposes of convenience and economy held their annual meetings as a part of the meeting of the Conference. Each division chairman with more or less help from his committee members planned the program of the division . . . There was no clearing of division programs with those of the Kindred Groups except as was voluntarily done by the chairmen. The result was all too frequently duplication of subjects and speakers and little relationship between programs.

The first step taken toward improving the building of the program was the inauguration of two program conferences each year at which each division chairman and the program chairmen of each Kindred Group reported their program plans to the entire group. Duplication of subject matter disappeared almost at once

and a healthy growth of joint meetings between various groups of similar or overlapping interests took place.

The next step was the abolition of the divisions which had become so static that they could not easily be changed from year to year as the situation required. In their place were set up four sections and later a fifth, based on broad functions of social work. Officers and committee members elected by the entire membership of the Conference head these sections. In addition, the Conference Program Committee is authorized to organize as many special committees for the discussion of particular important topics as it deems wise. The Executive Committee was reorganized to serve solely as the administrative group of all interests of the Conference, being relieved of former responsibilities in program planning.

The Program Committee starts its work in September and usually meets about once a month until the January program conference. At these times plans for the program are determined. The process of frank, round-table discussion of mutual program plans has added strength each year to the program as a whole.

Referring to Conference publications, the most important is the Proceedings of the annual meeting. In the past ten years the distribution of the Proceedings has grown from about 2,300 to more than 5,000.

The Proceedings compose the best single reference source on the history of American social work. They are used extensively by schools and colleges and by professional training schools. Many agencies also use them for training of staff and board members. A new cumulative index covering the first sixty volumes was compiled and published in recognition of the increasing difficulty in using the great abundance of uncorrelated material. A revised edition is to be published later.

Of the four issues of the Bulletin each year, one is devoted to the preliminary program of the annual meeting, another to a summary of the annual meeting and a third principally to a membership directory.

For many years various organizations in special fields of social work have held their meetings or conferences at the same time and place as the National Conference of Social Work. In fact, these specialized agencies are made up to a very large extent of the same people who are interested in the Conference. The Associate Group meetings are a real part of the Conference to the attendants at the annual meeting, and they are so regarded by the Conference administration. Formerly—in the days when they were known as Kindred Groups—their relation to the Conference was very loose. Virtually any group that pleased could meet as a Kindred Group without regard to its standards of work or its effect on other social work.

SOME years ago it became desirable to define more closely the kinds of agencies that should be accorded the privilege of the status of a recognized Associate Group of the Conference. Identification with the Con-

ference is of real value to an organization. Some agencies were anxious to meet with and be identified with the Conference almost entirely for the publicity value it gave them . . . Therefore, a committee studied the whole problem and recommended certain standards and requirements that should be met by any organization which desired the mutually advantageous relation of Associate Group of the National Conference of Social Work. The status of Associate Group was assumed to be a permanent one.

However, each year there are certain state-wide or local groups that wish to meet with the Conference for that year. Also some organizations wish to try the relationship for a few years before entering into a more permanent one. Hence the classification of Special Group was established for these organizations.

Admission to the status of Associate Group is by invitation of the Executive Committee of the Conference based on a recommendation of the Program Committee of the Conference or upon application of the group itself to the Executive Committee.

Such admission is granted, except in the case of renewals, only to such incorporated or permanently organized agencies engaged in a recognized phase of social work and as have branches or agencies or members actually and professionally engaged in not less than seven states and also as have indicated their adherence to high standards of work in one or more of the respective social work fields of case work, group work, social reform and legislation, social research, social work administration. In 1927, twenty-five organizations maintained the status of Kindred Groups, fourteen of them meeting with the Conference that year. This year thirty-eight Associate groups and sixteen as Special Groups—a total of fifty-four—were approved and met with the Conference in Indianapolis.

A comparison of the 1927 and 1937 lists shows that while many organizations have met with the Conference continuously, some have dropped out and a large number have been added representing new fields of work or new alignments of social interests. In some instances organizations now meeting with the Conference felt ten years ago that they were not a part of social work.

During the years the relationship has been strengthened. Representatives of the Associate Groups participate in the two program conferences held each year for the clearing of program plans. Joint meetings between the groups and various sections of the Conference are arranged. The administrative staff of the Conference in almost every instance makes all the local arrangements for meetings. National publicity is given Associate Group meetings through the preliminary program of the Conference and the other publicity releases, and the press service handles their material for news releases at the time of the annual meeting on the same basis as the Conference itself.

For many years the annual meeting of the Conference has been recognized as one of the most important sources of news material about social work. Until re-

cent years, however, this fact was not capitalized in any effective way. In April, 1935, a full-time publicity director was employed to develop the publicity for the Conference and assist with membership promotion. The increasing attention which the national press services have given to the annual meeting and the response of the various broadcasting chains show that we have made a good beginning in using the well known news channels for giving widespread national publicity to what is said at the annual meeting. However, so much valuable material comes in the one week that only a small part of it can be used. Much of it can and will be increasingly used during the rest of the year.

Turning to a consideration of state conferences, it should be pointed out that there always has been the heartiest cooperation between the National Conference of Social Work and the now more than forty state conferences. Many of the state conferences have patterned their organization after that of the National. Officers and staff of the National have appeared on state conference programs many times. There is a steady flow of correspondence between the National office and the secretaries or other officers of state conferences on all kinds of problems. Instead of the National Conference's organizing regional conferences—as was considered some years ago—it was decided that the National should work with the state conferences, assisting them as they desired in becoming stronger.

At present the secretarial work of the Association of State Conference Secretaries is furnished by the National Conference. An occasional bulletin is distributed to all state conference secretaries and presidents. A series of meetings is held each year in various sections of the country at which state conference secretaries discuss common problems, and a staff member of the

National office brings into the discussion the experience of other states. A handbook on state conference organization, methods and administration is in preparation.

One of the new developments in conferences was in the International Conference of Social Work. The inspiration to organize the International, which would bring together social workers from all countries, came to Dr. Rene Sand when he attended meetings of the National Conference in 1919 and 1923. The first meeting of the International Conference was in Paris, France, in 1928. Succeeding meetings have been held in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, in 1932, and London, England, in 1936. From its beginning, the International Conference has received the heartiest cooperation and support of the National Conference. With the help of generous appropriations from several American foundations and a gift of \$1,000 from the National Conference, the first meeting was organized. The National Conference has been always the representative of the International Conference in the United States. Through its office, information has been distributed concerning each meeting, and memberships and contributions have been obtained so that social work in the United States always has met its full share of the financial support.

In this resume of many of the more important facts relating to the Conference during the past ten years no attempt has been made to measure the mass of correspondence or the details of the records. Your secretary knows that what success has been attained is due to a great extent to the hearty unselfish work of hundreds of Conference members who have served on committees, spoken on programs or participated in many other ways in the Conference. The best days are yet ahead.

So We Made A Study

(Continued from Page 2)

lay in the replies to the third point of the letter. In requesting suggested changes or improvements we suspected this might embrace the answer to many resignations. We supposed some of the withdrawals could be traced to what some of the former members regarded as shortcomings. Instead there was almost a complete endorsement of the Conference set-up and program. Typical comments were these:

"I have found the Conference has advanced with the times, and the program has met every need, so I have no suggestion to offer."

"I have no suggestions to make regarding changes or improvements in Conference operation or service, inasmuch as the week spent at Atlantic City (in 1936) was one of the most interesting and educational experiences of my life."

Unless one might take to heart this whimsical proposal from a Pennsylvania social worker:

"My suggestion is to keep the Conference in the East—for the benefit of impoverished Pittsburghers."

What is indicated by this brief study and the figures it reveals? Various interpretations may be developed from a given set of statistics. But . . .

Conference finances would reach a new level of stability and the Conference could more rapidly and more soundly expand its services to its members and the field of social work . . . if, on the basis of the figures presented above, the 37.5 percent represented by the "check-senders," the "pay-when-they-go-to-meeting group" and the "let-the-agency-payers" were to maintain continuous individual memberships; if half the 43 percent of the financially troubled group (who expect to send their membership fees by January) were to maintain Conference affiliation, and if these percentages were applied to a substantial part (say 7,500) of the approximate 16,000 "in-and-outers."

Reduced to figures, it seems logical and possible. Does it not?